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Engaging Preservice Teachers with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Three Model Lessons for Teacher Educators

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Abstract: In this article, we present three example lessons focused on intentionally developing preservice teacher (PST) knowledge of culturally responsive teaching in each of our literacy courses. We use culturally responsive teaching as a framework to expand PSTs beyond surface level thinking of diversity by modeling specific literacy practices that embrace students' cultural experiences and connect to academic learning. We offer teacher educators tools and resources to combat popular myths of diverse families, access language and literature for teaching social justice, and use facilitative texts to scaffold affirming and accurate language in their own teaching contexts.

Keywords: preservice teachers, culturally responsive teaching, teacher education



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Introduction¹

As teacher educators it is our responsibility to prepare our students to be culturally responsive teachers. In a world with rich diversity, it is important to move preservice teachers (PSTs) beyond surface level thinking when it comes to diverse issues in education. Too often, the only categories of diversity acknowledged are related to race. Silverman (2010) suggests that “race is highly associated with terms such as diversity and multiculturalism because of its relatively high degree of availability in individuals’ minds” (p. 299). Silverman further explains,

Race is often easily visible, social issues around race consistently appear in media, and individuals may experience increased levels of self-awareness around others of different racial heritage (see Steele & Aronson, 1995). This is contrasted with sexual orientation, which is not usually readily visible and therefore may not evoke as many threatening stereotypes. (Silverman, 2010, p. 299)

Race is a salient issue for us and is represented in the lessons that follow, but does not encompass all of what we seek to address in this article. If the norm is White, Christian, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, English-speaking, etc., then inferiority is implied when people are described as “other” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Deficit language exists, then, because it is comparative. As teacher educators we want all students to be culturally affirmed in their teachers’ classrooms, and we believe that in order for this to happen, PSTs need tools to be more culturally affirming in their language and actions. When we consider these goals

for our teaching, we recognize that *all* PSTs (regardless of their identities) can benefit from broader definitions of diversity to affirm the lived experiences and communities of *all* of their future students. Although teacher education programs across the country have begun the work of better preparing the nation’s educators to effectively meet the needs of a diverse student body (Bissonnette, 2016), more work can be done. In this article, we explore our teaching practices through the lens of culturally responsive teaching and share three lessons that we have developed and honed in our literacy courses with PSTs.

As we continue on our journey of being culturally responsive teacher educators, we ensure that our PSTs are familiar with the underpinnings of this theory and the notion that all students should feel welcome and valued in their classrooms, and that they should honor their students’ knowledge and experiences (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). We ground our work with PSTs in Culturally Responsive Instruction and we draw on Gay’s (2010) definition:

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. (p. 31).

There are a variety of terms that educators and researchers use to describe this framework (see Gay, 2018). However, we will use *culturally responsive* in this article because, like Gay, while not negating the importance of other terms, we “feel it represents a

¹ We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article we will use

“he” to refer to individuals who identify as male, “she” to refer to individuals who identify as female.

compilation of ideas and explanations from a variety of scholars” (p. 36). We understand that in order to teach to the strengths of students, we must embrace affirming practices and language. Delpit (2006a; 2006b) asserts that teachers must know their students both inside and outside their classrooms in order to truly know their strengths. Delpit suggests if teachers do not build relationships with their students and get to know their strengths, they can easily embrace deficit perspectives, which can lead to lower expectations opposed to preparing them for challenges of the real world. Jones, Clarke, and Enriquez (2009) argue that teachers have the power to position students in their classrooms as not capable or smart, using terms like *struggling* or *at-risk*, and can erase teacher perceptions of students' strengths altogether (Dyson, 2015).

In early literature on equitable and just pedagogical practices, Ladson-Billings (1994) provided a lens into specific classrooms that enacted practices for all student learners. Researchers continue to expand this vision for us and challenge us to consider how to infuse culturally responsive practices into teacher education programs in support of PSTs (Boyd & Noblit, 2015; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Durden, Dooley, & Truscott, 2016; Dyches & Boyd, 2017; Howard, 2003; Jimenez, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Picower & Kohli, 2017; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014; Zygmunt, Clark, Clausen, Mucherah, & Tancock, 2016). For example, Dyches and Boyd (2017) discuss the importance of culturally responsive teaching in teacher education, in a way that requires a commitment to both content and pedagogy through a social justice lens, employing the theoretical model of Social Justice Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (SJPACK). They argue this framework is a way to envision teacher preparation in a way that focuses on social justice and the disruption of oppression. Dyches and Boyd (2017) assert that traditional equity pedagogies do not push students to think critically beyond

presenting content and into the realm of disrupting the content through “liberating pedagogies” (p. 486).

In framing our work with PSTs in culturally responsive pedagogy, we share the belief that when instruction is presented to students in ways that help them connect to their own cultures and experiences, they will find success in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Souto-Manning, Llerena, Martell, Maguire, & Arce-Boardman, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). As we enact this belief, we must help PSTs find ways to understand and value diverse cultures and experiences. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest it is important to know and build on the cultural experiences of all students as a culturally responsive teacher. They suggest that in order to adequately prepare culturally responsive teachers, teacher educators should consider the desired characteristics of this group and define a culturally responsive teacher as a teacher who

- (a) is socioculturally conscious, that is, recognizes that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order;
- (b) has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be overcome;
- (c) sees himself or herself as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students;
- (d) understands how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction;
- (e) knows about the lives of his or her students; and
- (f) uses his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what

they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar. (p. 21)

When we examine the literature, there are many examples of culturally responsive teaching across K-12 classrooms with several researchers providing insight into K-12 classrooms through hip-hop pedagogy (Emdin, 2016; Love, 2014), digital literacies (Price-Dennis & Carrion, 2017; Price-Dennis, Holmes, & Smith, 2015), and the concept of culturally responsive teaching as an “everyday practice” (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017).

However, even as PSTs have these models of culturally responsive instruction on paper, they still often walk away asking, “How do I implement similar practices in my (future) classroom?” We seek to answer their inquiries by explicitly modeling culturally affirming practices in our own classrooms and providing spaces for authentic conversations that ask PSTs to disrupt their traditional thinking in ways that will advance their growth as culturally responsive teachers.

Jimenez (2014) asserts that many educators find PSTs hesitant to discuss difficult topics, and teacher educators must “provide experiences that encourage PSTs to stop avoiding these issues and do the hard work of engaging with ideas and people that do not align with long held beliefs or familiar settings” (p. 69). Our goal then is to establish authentic, critical reflections of learning opposed to surface level experiences that help PSTs become more comfortable discussing topics of diversity and giving them language to be more culturally aware, knowledgeable, and responsive to students by offering specific lessons to support PSTs in literacy classrooms. In other words, we must show them

how to enact a curriculum that values their students’ lived experiences, and how these experiences serve as bridges to promote student learning (Sleeter, 2012).

In the next section we describe the context of our teaching and our PSTs. When planning each of our example lessons for PSTs, we often reflect on the young students we have taught and how we, as teachers, have strived to consider the ways in which we can better connect students’ lived experiences to academic learning and prepare them for real world challenges. Each of us approaches teaching from a social constructivist and socially just perspective.

We have a combined total of 24 years of teaching experience in K-12 schools. Christy taught for 10 years in secondary settings, Mikkaka taught primary-aged students for 6 years, and Anne taught intermediate-aged elementary students for 8 years. Together we have taught students across a wide-range of student groups, geographic locations, and educational settings.

Context

Currently we work at a large public university located in a mostly rural area of southeastern U.S.. The university graduates approximately 150 elementary (K-5) teacher candidates each year. We each teach in the Reading Education program and collectively teach three of the five reading courses offered to elementary and special education PSTs. Christy typically teaches a reading course focused on literacy in a diverse world, Mikkaka teaches a reading methods course focused on strategies for primary (K-2 grades) students, and Anne teaches an intermediate grades (3-5) methods course. These

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three literacy courses serve as the context for the lesson examples highlighted in this article.

Our PSTs tend to identify as White and female, which mirrors The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report that 82% of public school teachers were White and 76.2% identified as female (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Our institution attracts first generation college students, students from the local and rural area, and students from the northeast region of the U.S.. Sixty-seven percent of all university students at our institution identify as White with 59% of students identifying as female.

In the next section, from each of our personal perspectives, we outline example lessons we use in our literacy courses that are focused on modeling culturally responsive teaching to PSTs. These lessons, which we have developed and honed in our work with PSTs, focus on expanding definitions of diversity beyond race and ethnicity to also include social class, gender, dis)ability, and/or neurodiversity, etc.), and sexual identities. The first lesson uses facilitative texts to develop and acquire affirming and accurate language about gender and sexual identity in an interactive read aloud, the second lesson combats popular myths of diverse families through critical discussions of readings, and the final lesson teaches PSTs to access language and literature for activism and teaching for social justice.

Facilitative Texts to Scaffold Affirming and Accurate Language

I (Anne) use children’s literature to build PST capacity for culturally relevant instruction by modeling how to scaffold language about topics of diversity using *facilitative texts*, or texts that scaffold readers to learn and develop accurate and affirming language used in the text from the perspective of characters and/or groups represented in a text

(Howard & Ticknor, under review). Facilitative texts can be used to scaffold language on a variety of diversity-related topics, and the lesson presented in this section is one example of how I use facilitative texts to develop and acquire affirming and accurate language about gender and sexual identity in an interactive read aloud (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Although most of my PSTs have experienced an interactive read aloud (IRA) either as a classroom student or in another teacher education setting, many of them have not experienced how teachers can implement an IRA to understand and value diverse cultures and lived experiences of their students. By intentionally engaging PSTs in an IRA from a culturally responsive stance, I am able to model and make explicit how to guide interpretative and shared meaning making among a community of learners while at the same time expose PSTs to a variety of diverse and culturally relevant literature to use in their classrooms and build PSTs’ affirmative and accurate language about cultural and social topics.

The initial steps of my IRA follow a general framework of selecting a quality piece of literature, introducing the text, encouraging participation, and reading aloud. To make the IRA culturally relevant, I purposefully select children’s literature that is diverse in terms of author perspectives, character demographics (such as gender, identity, (dis)ability, and/or neurodiversity, etc.), complex social issues (such as oppression, struggle, inequity, etc.), and groups represented (Gay, 2010). May, Bingham, and Pendergast (2014) advocate that culturally and linguistically relevant read-alouds begin with culturally competent teachers who hold high expectations and take a critical stance when selecting literature and engaging students in talk about the text. I follow their lead and extend their recommendations to select texts to include gender and sexual identity. What makes the texts I select both culturally relevant and *facilitative texts* is that

- Boelts, M. (2007). *Those shoes*. Somerville, MA: Candelwick Press.
- de Haan, L., & Nijland, S. (2000). *King and king*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle.
- de la Pena, M. (2015). *Last stop on Market Street*. New York, NY: GP. Putnam's Sons.
- Elliott, Z. (2016). *Milo's museum*. Middletown, DE: Rosetta Press.
- Elwin, R., & Paulse, M. (1990). *Asha's mums*. (D. Lee, Illus.). Toronto, CA: Three O'Clock Press.
- Hall, M. (2015). *Red: A crayon's story*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Heide, F.P., & Gilliland, J.H. (1990). *The day of Ahmed's secret*. (T. Lewin, Illus.). New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Herthel, H., & Jennings, J. (2014). *I am Jazz*. (S. McNichols, Illus.). New York, NY: Dial Books.
- Kilodavis, C. (2011). *My princess boy: A mom's story about a young boy who loves to dress up*. (S. DeSimone, Illus.). New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Parr, T. (2003). *The family book*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Parr, T. (2007). *We belong together: A book about adoption and families*. New York, NY: Little Brown.
- Polacco, P. (2009). *In our mothers' house*. New York, NY: Philomel.
- Richardson, J., & Parnell, P. (2005). *And Tango makes three*. (H. Cole, Illus.). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Yangsook, C. (2003). *The name jar*. New York, NY: Dell Dragonfly Books.

Figure 1. *Examples of Children's Literature Used to Support Diversity*

they offer explicit examples of accurate language from the perspective of the group represented. The textual examples can also be used to develop affirming language to encourage the talk and engagement that Jimenez (2014) suggests and that I take up in my teaching practices. Examples of literature that I use in my literacy methods course specific to gender and sexual identity are included in Figure 1.

I begin the IRA by sharing the cover and reading the title and author/illustrator information aloud and asking PSTs to share their ideas, wonderings, (dis)connections, etc. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). By first asking PSTs for their impressions, I can later make specific connections to new knowledge gained from the text. Then I introduce three concepts, which are recursively modeled throughout the semester. The first is the concept of texts acting as windows, which allow readers to see into lived experiences unlike their own, and/or mirrors, which reflect back lived experiences similar to readers'

lives, (Bishop, 1990), both of which children need exposure to in a culturally responsive classroom. The second concept is that texts can and *should* disrupt single stories by using literature that presents alternative narratives to "make historical events, people, and cultural narratives messy, more complex, and more validating to *all* students" (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014, p. 36; emphasis in original). The third concept is that facilitative texts can build culturally affirming and accurate language about social issues and topics. I pause in outlining my IRA process to provide a detailed example of using a facilitative text with the recently published picture book *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* (Bundo & Twiss, 2018), which was written in response to the current Vice President's stance on marriage equality and is a fictional story of two male bunnies who fall in love, want to marry, counter resistance, persevere, and marry.

After the initial steps of introducing the text and first two concepts, I access prior knowledge about the topic of marriage equality and the significance of

Marlon Bundo as a character to begin modeling the facilitative text concept. If PSTs have misconceptions or do not connect the current Vice President’s legislative stance on marriage equality in the U.S., I briefly share recent media reports (see for example Drabold, 2016; GLAAD, n.d.; Sinclair, 2018). I purposefully use the phrase “marriage equality” while also defining the acronym LGBTQ+ and the terms “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” because many of my PSTs either do not use these terms in their language or are unsure of accurate definitions. As other educators have found, PSTs may be unprepared to discuss issues related to sexuality (Staley & Leonardi, 2016) in their classrooms or only if a student identifies as LGBTQ+ (Schmidt, Chang, Carolan-Silva, Lockhart, & Anagnostopoulos, 2012). My PSTs often echo these sentiments and tell me that they are uncomfortable discussing lived experiences different from their own, especially about sexuality and with young children. PSTs usually ask clarifying questions and/or share knowledge or experiences they have about the language I am using and defining.

I facilitate this discussion in several ways to encourage dialogue between learners and to build common understandings. I pause both physically and verbally, welcome all comments, mediate dialogue and/or misconceptions as needed, encourage ambiguity to allow for learning from the text and each other, and intentionally scaffold and encourage PSTs to use affirmative and accurate language central to the text. In other words, the text becomes the vehicle to facilitate language usage and development about gender and sexual identity from the perspective of the characters.

Continuing with the IRA process, I read aloud the first few pages of the text, sharing illustrations, rereading salient passages, pausing at significant points to encourage dialogic participation, encouraging quieter participants to share their

thinking, and maintaining a critical stance to “share in the vulnerability by facilitating discussion” (May et al., 2014) about topics such as marriage equality and LGBTQ+ equity. As PSTs share their comments and noticings, I continue to facilitate participation and use the text language to develop accurate and affirmative language. For example, after reading page 3 of *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* (Bundo & Twiss, 2018), which describes Marlon’s morning activities as lonely, I ask PSTs to make predictions about what may make this particular day a “Very Special Day.” PSTs often infer that Marlon finds another bunny to make his day less lonely. As I continue to read, their prediction is confirmed that Marlon meets Wesley, another “boy bunny” (no page) and they decide to marry.

What continues to make this a culturally responsive IRA using a facilitative text is when I read aloud that Marlon and Wesley’s friends are happy for them, but the law does not allow same-sex bunnies to marry, which parallels recent US laws about marriage equality. We return to pages 20-23 to discuss the textual examples of how the word “different” is used as a negative description and then reappropriated as positive to describe the unique qualities and characteristics of each animal character. I encourage PSTs to make connections to their own lived experiences as “different” as an example of a mirror text and to also consider how the text can be a window for LGBTQ+ lived experiences. During this discussion, I scaffold PSTs’ accurate and affirming language use of phrases defined during the book introduction and language used in the text by the characters that represent their lived experiences.

Once the text is read, PSTs reflect on the overall text message and how their understandings of the text topic deepened and/or changed. Inevitably PSTs ask about reading this text, or a similar text with LGBTQ+ characters, in their classrooms and how to respond to parent or administrative resistance. My

first questions in response are usually, “What kind of resistance do you think you would encounter?” and “Why would you assume resistance?” These questions help me to both acknowledge their concerns and understand their assumptions, and possibly misconceptions, of resistance. As the discussion continues, I remind PSTs that all students need to have examples of windows and mirrors in their literacy classrooms, and that a story of love and equality is an excellent example of both a window and a mirror for students in their future classrooms. I prompt PSTs to contemplate how a text with LGBTQ+ characters and perspectives, such as *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* (Bundo & Twiss, 2018), can act as a window to build affirming perspectives about lived experiences different than their own and provide them with more accurate and affirming language so they are able to be more comfortable discussing topics of diversity not only with young children but also with adults. I also encourage PSTs to consider how isolated and discounted students’ lived experiences may feel without mirrors in the texts they read.

These reminders serve to push past comfort and engage in the “hard work” Jimenez (2014, p. 69) described to bolster more comfort and confidence in our PSTs to provide culturally responsive teaching, such as an IRA, which can act as a conduit for connecting student lived experiences to learning and prepare students for challenges of the real world.

Combatting Popular Myths of Diverse Families

In this section I (Mikkaka), address diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, as well as socioeconomic status. In a 2012 TedTalk, Christopher Emdin (2012)

discussed his concept of *Reality Pedagogy*—a practical guide to culturally responsive pedagogy (a term Emdin intentionally moves away from due to what he sees as its overuse and consequent dilution). What struck me about this talk was his focus on language, as well as his analogy of White guilt as a boulder teachers carry. Emdin focused on the language used to recruit new teachers and, specifically, how that language is laden with emotional undertones designed to evoke guilt. Thus, prospective educators shoulder a heavy burden of White guilt that they carry with them as they enter the profession to assuage that guilt by helping “those kids”: the poor Black and Brown children

with the tragic home lives. Emdin ends the analogy by explaining how the teachers then drop that boulder of guilt on the heads of the students they serve.

Similarly, I believe that new and prospective teachers have good intentions but, like Emdin, I worry about their perceptions of diverse students and how those perceptions affect their learning and their future practice. I worry

about the language they are internalizing and the implicit biases undergirding that language. To combat this possibility, in a series of lessons I facilitate conversations around commonly held negative beliefs about students and families (Overstreet & Nightengale-Lee, under review). PSTs are required to read Compton-Lilly’s (2002) chapter *Twelve Myths of Poor and Diverse Parents*. These myths include the following:

- Parents Are Content to Rely on Welfare
- Parents Are Caught in a Cycle of Poverty
- Parents Are Often Children Themselves
- Poor Households are Vacant of Print

“prospective educators shoulder a heavy burden of White guilt that they carry with them as they enter the profession to assuage that guilt by helping ‘those kids’—the poor Black and Brown children with the tragic home lives.”

- Parents Have No Interest in Their Own Learning
- Parents Do Not Care About School
- Parents Don't Know How to Help Their Children With Reading
- Parents Don't Help Their Children With Reading
- Parents Can't Read
- Parents Don't Read
- Parents Grew Up in Households Without Literacy
- Parents Lack Resources to Help Kids With Reading

PSTs read and respond to the chapter as a homework assignment. While a variety of reading response strategies are used throughout the semester to engage students with professional literature, “ink sheddings” proved a powerful method for gathering honest reflections on uncomfortable topics that PSTs might more easily unpack in writing. Ink sheddings are a reading response technique that require readers to engage in sustained, stream-of-consciousness writing in response to a text, to highlight key passages in their writing, and to share their writing with others who have also read the text. In this case, after reading the *12 Myths* chapter, the PSTs are expected to free write continuously for a predetermined period. I suggest that they set a timer for five to fifteen minutes. Next, they highlight parts of their writing that they think capture key ideas.

In the following class session, the PSTs pass their ink sheddings around a group of five or six students. Their small group members read the highlighted text and “ink shed” their thoughts in the margins. After several turns the free write is returned to the author, who is given time to read the feedback from their peers. PSTs then engage in brief conversations in their small groups, to discuss their thoughts and

reflect on any new ideas evoked during the ink shedding process.

We follow these conversations with a whole group debrief. Usually, PSTs report that they believed the myths initially and/or have heard many of the myths expressed by practicing teachers in their field placements. They question one another’s thinking and wonder about the experiences that have led them and others to accept these myths as fact. Some maintain that the myths are at least partially true, others remain unsure.

Just as Anne pushes past comfort, Jiminez (2014) encourages by bringing in data beyond anecdotes and experiences, I continue to trouble the myths by supplying additional evidence. For example, when confronting the idea that racially and ethnically diverse parents are content to rely on welfare, I provide demographic data on welfare recipients. This information often leads the PSTs to question both historical events and current events, as well as the racist and sexist implications of such widely accepted ideas. We repeat this process after the initial reading of the chapter to revisit individual myths in subsequent class sessions.

Although I find this text incredibly useful, particularly with PSTs who express hearing these myths regularly in their field placements, I do have qualms. Most importantly, I am somewhat uncomfortable with the language of the chapter title. Although I know that poverty and racial/ethnic diversity often overlap, the pairing of the two in the chapter title seems to suggest a false equivalency. Further, the chapter is from a book focused on combating racism, and thus the meaning of “diverse” in this context only includes racial, ethnic, and perhaps linguistic differences. Too often, those are the only categories of diversity my students initially acknowledge, but they are not encompassing all of what we seek to address in our work with PSTs.

My PSTs respond in a variety of ways. Some are intrigued and want to learn more, some feel as if I have validated them or given them the language to talk about phenomena they have seen or experienced, but often I encounter PSTs who feel disconnected from or even attacked by these conversations. Encouraging this type of reflection around topics participants perceive as uncomfortable can be challenging and often results in pushback. During nearly every one of our 12 Myths discussion, I observed some degree of pushback from my PSTs, including surface level engagement, often exhibited by a participant latching onto the safest aspect of the topic (e.g., “tolerance” or “diverse books,” disengagement, diversion, or outright rejection).

Overall, however, PSTs are often less defensive and more thoughtful because we have the time and opportunity to build community and engage in the kind of ongoing experiences that are at the heart of true professional learning (Overstreet, 2017). PSTs often profess being pushed to reflect and feeling inspired to action by these conversations. They are compelled to think about their own biases and blind spots, a practice I attempt to model regularly. One PST, Laura*, summed up dozens of responses I have received from PSTs over the years, saying

I think it is important to be honest with yourself. That is how we learn and grow from our mistakes. . . .I really love the questions that she asked and how she was able to admit her flaws and past mistakes.

Such critical reflection is, indeed, essential to growth (Bissonnette, 2016) and gets PSTs thinking about their emerging practice. Most PSTs express

that they have been somewhat moved by these conversations over time. Growth is meaningful, no matter how miniscule it may seem at the time; true change is a process and learning is an ongoing endeavor. Thus, it is important to think about cultural responsiveness as a spectrum rather than an all or nothing accomplishment. Despite pushback, I am encouraged that we are making meaningful progress.

Language and Literature for Teaching Social Justice

This section addresses diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Specifically, I (Christy) will discuss the use of literature to explore these aspects of diversity and culturally responsive teaching. These ideas are the foundation of a course

“I think it is important to be honest with yourself. That is how we learn and grow from our mistakes.”

that focuses on literacy in a diverse world. Over the years, at the conclusion of the course, PSTs have emailed me telling me how much they valued what they learned in the course. At times the feedback has been

deep and meaningful; however, at times some of the comments have consisted of a surface-level approach to teaching and learning that has left me wondering if I have done it all wrong. Do they really understand the “why” and “how” of culturally responsive teaching and building on students’ funds of knowledge? Have I given them the resources and rationale for this approach to teaching? Have they embraced culturally affirming language, or are they still left with deficit perspectives and ways of talking that fail to promote building students up and instead consequently lead to tearing them down?

As I reflected on these questions, I noticed some of my weaknesses as well as some of my strengths in this area. The series of lessons I facilitate are based on what I believe to be some of my strengths from

the activities I use in my literacy courses. It has always been my intention to teach through a social justice lens, particularly when I consider preparing teachers for the rich diversity of their future classrooms. This lens helps teachers to provide space to build relationships with students, build an awareness of different cultures, and value the experiences of all students.

As part of culturally responsive instruction, when working with PSTs about teaching diverse books, I recognize the importance of linking content to pedagogy. It is not enough to teach PSTs the content (diverse books) and focus on the importance of windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990), but it is equally important to teach PSTs how to engage their students with diverse texts and how to create tasks with the purpose of interrogating multiple perspectives, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and helping students make connections to their lived experiences. Jimenez (2014) suggests that in addition to traditional culturally responsive teaching activities such as reading diverse books and attending public events related to diversity, we “must encourage our students to talk and intellectually engage with these issues” (p. 69). To that end I strive to critically reflect on ways to prepare PSTs to engage their students with diverse texts.

When I begin discussing diverse books, I share many titles with students (see Figure 1 for examples of texts), conduct read-alouds, and ask them to be critical consumers of texts with questions such as,

- What is the purpose of this text?
- What type of characters does the author use to promote this purpose?
- Who has the power in this text?
- Whose voices are represented in this text?
- Whose voices are missing from this text?

- How would this text be different if the story was told from the perspective of the missing voices?
- Does this book promote or challenge stereotypes?
- How are characters marginalized or celebrated in these texts?

Through these discussion, we focus on the importance of mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990), specifically the importance of using literature as a resource to learn and value the lived experiences of others and as an opportunity for students to see themselves in texts. I explain to students the importance of diverse populations of students seeing people who look like them or have similar experiences in positive contexts and roles in books. Additionally I share the extended knowledge we can gain from reading about characters who may have very different experiences. We discuss the many ways that books portray characters, and the implications for their future classrooms.

I recognize it is not enough to simply “book talk” books, but we must interrogate books and consider how they can bring learning alive for our students. In choosing diverse texts, I recognize that some students may not be comfortable engaging in conversations related to diversity, so I begin on the very first day of class trying to foster a safe space for learning. In order to foster a safe space for learning, from the beginning I explain the importance of valuing everyone’s opinions and providing space for all voices. I also share my personal experiences, including my shortcomings related to teaching about diversity, showing them it is a process, one that I am committed to engaging in for the rest of my career. I discuss the importance of embracing discomfort and working through and talking through our moments of discomfort when they arise. Most importantly I discuss the necessity of

having an open mind and learning from and with each other.

Beginning the conversation around texts and real-world connections has proven to be beneficial as we begin with fictional characters and move to consider how their stories are relevant to the lived experiences of real students. Over the course of the semester, I share several titles. The titles I share are picture books, geared toward an audience of elementary students but certainly appropriate for meaningful discussions at the middle school level as well. I begin the semester with *Milo's Museum* by Elliott (2016). We read this text during the second week of classes. I chose this book because it is a book with clear implications for culturally responsive teaching.

Specifically, it shows a young girl beginning to question the world around her and consider how she might make positive changes within her community by lifting her voice and celebrating her experiences and her identity and inviting others in to celebrate

with her. In this book the main character is going on a field trip to the museum. When she arrives she looks at the beautiful artwork, but wonders about the purpose of museums. Her grandfather tells her they are meant to hold valuable objects and tell stories from long ago as well as today. The main character, Milo, recognizes that the museum did not hold any of her stories and decides to discuss this issue with her aunt (who happens to be wearing a "Black Lives Matter" t-shirt). Milo wants to know why her stories are not in the museum and who gets to decide such things. Her aunt tells her that we can let our voices be heard by "voting with our feet" (p. 11) and supporting the exhibits that are meaningful to us. She also lifts Milo's voice by asking her what she would like to do about it and offering ideas. Milo

"We want them to make connections that require them to think critically and to move their thinking forward to community and real world social action."

decides to make her own museum in her neighborhood in order to tell her story.

When I share this text with my PSTs, I ask them to critically reflect on the text. We discuss the things that make up Milo's social and cultural experiences. We discuss the importance of considering all students' social and cultural experiences. We discuss how their experiences might be different or similar to Milo's. We also discuss the role of Milo's aunt and why the author may have chosen to have her wear the t-shirt. This is not always an easy question. Often students are reluctant to answer, but we create a safe space to discuss the implications of this choice and why they may not be comfortable discussing it and what those discussions might look

like in their classroom with affirming language, not language that devalues students' perspectives.

We discuss the agency Milo enacts as she creates her own museum. We discuss how this text might engage students and what they may consider putting

into their own museums. We also discuss Milo's identity and how she showcases her identity through this museum. At the conclusion of reading this story, many PSTs say they would use the text in their classrooms as a way to learn more about their students. Although this is a good conversation and we make progress in interrogating the text, I want to push my PSTs further. I ask, "If you learn about your students, what will you do with that knowledge?" With this imperative in mind, I continue to ask students to investigate diverse texts through this lens.

The next few days of class are spent discussing the importance of diverse books, with a visit to the teaching resource center in the library and a guest

speech from the university librarian, who shares with students a range of diverse books and resources on how to find diverse books based on specific topics in the university library. After these experiences, as a whole class we read about CJ in *The Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015). I chose this text because it represents diversity in terms of social class, and it provides insights into the lived experiences of CJ in a rich context that allows the reader to easily relate to the characters, even if they may have different experiences.

Similar to how Anne asks her students for their first impressions of a text during a read aloud, when I initially share this picture book with my PSTs, I read it aloud to them and show them the pictures, asking them to “notice what they notice.” I find stopping points throughout the text to discuss the illustrations in the book, model my own thinking, and discuss how CJ changes from the beginning of the book to the end. After this initial read and conversation, I then break them into small groups of 4 or 5 students, and I ask them to read the text again in their groups. I ask them to consider the voices that are represented in the story, and how these voices might be similar or different from the voices of students in their practicum classrooms and their future classrooms. I ask them to consider how CJ’s experiences may be similar to their experiences, or how their experiences may be different. Because I want to focus on the importance of community, I also ask students to discuss the role of community in this text as well.

Next, I ask groups to revisit the text, and consider how they might plan tasks for their future students to engage with this text. I tell them that we want our students to question, investigate, converse, and connect in order to build knowledge that matters to them. We discuss the importance of having students build knowledge and think critically. We discuss the role of culturally responsive teaching as they create

their tasks. I tell them, “We don’t want our students to make surface level connections like, ‘I go to church too.’ We want them to make connections that require them to think critically and to move their thinking forward to community and real world social action.” I share an example that I created for this assignment, and as a class we brainstorm ideas to get them started. I then ask students to research ideas for community building and community projects. With these instructions, PSTs create tasks that would help their future students make these connections.

For example, one group created a task asking students to reflect on CJ’s community and explore their personal communities to determine what made it unique and why these things were important within these contexts. In this task, they asked students to show examples of how different people worked together to make the community a great place to live. The instructions for the task then asked students to take pictures and create a digital presentation or video blog sharing information about these places. A different group of PSTs created tasks for students to reflect on CJ’s volunteer work at the soup kitchen by researching and creating a written blog where they share all of the opportunities available for volunteering. The blog would act as a resource for students or families who wanted to support community volunteer initiatives.

Through these tasks created by PSTs, students would have to reflect on CJ’s community actions with his grandmother and think about and share the positive aspects of their personal communities. These types of tasks value the spaces students inhabit outside the classroom, “affirming their culture and talents” (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 12) and allowing students to share their knowledge with others as expert who become the producers of knowledge. These tasks are aligned with several of the components of Villegas and Lucas’ (2002)

framework asking PSTs to be socioculturally conscious, have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, know about the lives of their students, and use their “knowledge about students’ lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar” (p. 21). In addition, it aligns with tenets of social justice in embracing the diverse cultures of students in ways that reject a deficit perspective and shows that all students have experiences that can be a “foundation for their learning” (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 12). This approach to teaching also focuses on social justice in that it promotes “critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (p. 12).

In reflecting on this assignment and the importance of giving teachers culturally affirming language, in the future, I will ask my PSTs to interrogate the text further in an effort to more fully explore the lived experiences of CJ and how we might engage in discussion about CJ and his experiences. I will ask them to consider how someone using deficit language might talk about CJ’s experiences in this text and how someone using affirming language might talk about CJ’s experiences. I think this extension will be important, because although some students might see CJ’s experiences negatively, I, like Mikkaka, want to disrupt myths of poor and diverse communities. I model using affirming language to frame CJ as a young boy with rich experiences with both his family and his community. How PSTs discuss CJ’s experiences in this text may provide positive models for them to use culturally affirming language with their future students.

Conclusions

Although we all teach at the same university in the same teacher education program, our PSTs may not encounter each of us as their instructors and may not be exposed to this variety of culturally responsive instruction. Therefore, our next steps are

to provide PSTs these lessons as connected pieces within a course. We are currently conducting research based on the perspectives of PSTs as they encounter these lessons and how their perspectives might change throughout the course of the semester as they engage in other opportunities to explore culturally responsive teaching. These lessons will be taught within Christy’s Literacy Learning in a Diverse World course with a focus on teaching PSTs how to use culturally affirming language while embracing culturally responsive teaching.

As Christy and Mikkaka noted above, we have anecdotal feedback from our PSTs’ experiences with our individual lessons; however, we have not yet documented their reflections systematically across all three lessons, which will be part of our study. Through this process we will ask PSTs to critically reflect on these lessons, their experiences and their perceptions. It is not enough to simply present the information, but we must also ask PSTs to deconstruct the lessons and disrupt traditional thinking and approaches to diverse K-12 literacy classrooms. Such critical reflection is indeed essential to growth (Bissonnette, 2016) and gets PSTs thinking about their emerging practice (Howard, 2003). Through these lessons and reflections, we plan to be more intentional with our approach to these topics, framing them specifically in the lens of culturally responsive teaching. We also ask PSTs to become more critically conscious when they begin to examine issues of inequity in the world (Gay, 2010), and to explore these issues in classroom settings. We not only want PSTs to reflect on their practices; we will also continue to reflect on our own practices through classroom observations, lesson planning, and collaborative reflection opportunities. It is our goal to continue to provide meaningful learning opportunities for PSTs, and we recognize that in order to do this, we must critically reflect on our experiences, perceptions, and practices as well.

In this article, we presented example lessons focused on expanding PSTs' knowledge of how to be more culturally responsive educators and how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy through our modeling of specific literacy practices. In so doing, we offer teacher educators concrete pedagogical practices to use as a starting point for the challenging journey of teaching from a framework that does not always easily lend itself to application.

Although we recognize that culturally responsive teaching involves more than activities, these activities are a way of thinking about, reflecting on, and approaching education. We also know that there is value in adding to the slowly growing body of information regarding the enactment of this framework.

Teaching through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy helps us to establish authentic, critical experiences that will affect PSTs' professional identity and practice, thus laying the groundwork for meaningful learning beyond the confines of a single semester. As we model culturally responsive instruction, our PSTs are taught to understand these tenets as they consider the academic experiences they will provide for their students and help them to realize that learning is not only situated in the classroom, but begins with the lived experiences of our students outside the classroom as well.

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